

Testimony

LCO 3576, AAC Absentee Voting at the 2020 State Election and Election Day Registration

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Ranking Members Sampson and France and members of the GAE committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Jenna and I am a recent high school graduate from Suffield. I'm here on behalf of March For Our Lives Connecticut to share our strong support for LCO 3576. We're thankful for the work of the GAE and Secretary of State, but we have our concerns about the short notice of this session and the language of the bill. This bill still restricts voting rights beyond the language of the Constitution, and we urge the legislature to move to align the state statutes with our constitution.

A huge part of our work is encouraging civic engagement, as we recognize that our democracy is stronger when more people participate. Voting is a right that we get with our citizenship--we don't have to requalify for it by passing a test or paying a poll tax. It shouldn't only go to those of us who feel healthy enough to go to the polls. There's also no question to the authority of the Governor- the lawsuit that was just struck down by the Chief Justice proves that he can make these changes.

Suggested Revisions to the Draft Bill

We echo everyone else in asking to remove the words of "such elector's or person's" from the bill, which is used to define a person's illness. We believe that fear of illness is a justifiable reason to vote by absentee ballot. We also encourage the GAE to implement safeguards for communities of color, who face higher rates of infection and death due to inequities. Black voters' absentee ballots are rejected at a far higher rate than white voters. These changes can come in the form of extensions of registration periods and more accessible dropboxes and polls. We recognize that vote by mail hasn't been adopted more widely due to the same reason we have gerrymandered districts. We urge the committee to recognize these racial disparities and expand our voting rights more in the long run

Addressing Concern of Voter Fraud

To address voter fraud- News21 found just 196 cases of alleged fraud in CT during a period where 12 million votes were cast. Military personnel abroad have been voting by absentee ballot for years with virtually no claims of fraud. Safeguards like barcodes and signature verification are in place to ensure the integrity of the voting process. The only real threat is voter suppression.

Addressing Concern of Partisan Leaning

As others have mentioned, this has turned into a partisan issue, but there is no evidence of expanding absentee voting giving one party significant advantage over the other. In a California

special election for Congress this year, Republicans captured a seat that previously had been held by Democrats by making sure their voters had access to absentee ballots. Republicans also dominate Montana and Arizona, where 70% of voters are automatically mailed their ballots

Closing

Voting rights go hand-in-hand with so many issues we fight for, including police reform. We have to tear down the barriers to our rights and address the inequities mentioned earlier. We also want to emphasize that you have your seats because the people voted you in. We don't expect you to align with your constituents on all issues, but this is a non partisan one rooted in health and democracy. Moving forward with these changes will benefit all of you as the legislature should not have to come back in for more special sessions. I'm not old enough to vote and neither are many of my fellow MFOL organizers, but we believe we elected you to hold the inherent rights of the people before your party's interests. We urge that you pass this legislation after revising the language and making it apply for all future elections. Thank you.

Jenna Sun
March For Our Lives Connecticut